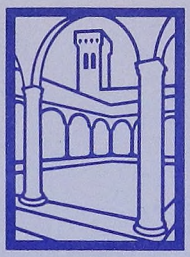

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CITY GOVERNMENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY UNITED STATES. STUDIES AND RESEARCH OF THE AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

by
Aurelio ALAIMO

European University Institute, Florence

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

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European University Institute
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Studies and Research of the American Historiography*

1. Introduction

The names of Tocqueville and Bryce appear frequently in the writings of American historians. A lot of research on city government in the 19th century refer to their analyses. In beginning reflections on this topic, it may be useful to mention some contrasting positions of the two authors. In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville put local administration at the center of his study on American institutions. He felt that the townships, counties and States had many defects as far as administrative organization went. However, these institutions had also had very positive political effects on American democracy. Thanks to them - he asserted - "In the United States the interests of the country are everywhere kept in view; they are an object of solicitude to the people of the whole Union, and every citizen is as warmly attached to them as if they were his own".(1) Fifty years later, in 1888, the Englishman James Bryce concluded his analysis of American municipal administrations with a very different verdict. (This is a verdict that cannot be ignored; it has recently been defined as "one of the most quoted lines in the history of American government"...)(2) "There is no denying - Bryce wrote - that the

government of cities is the one conscpicuous failure of the United States.(...) The faults of the States governments are insignificant compared with the extravagance, corruption and mismanagement which mark the administration of most of the great cities".(3)

The observations of the two European visitors ought to be seen in the light of a comprehensive consideration of their studies. I shall confine myself to recalling that their objectives and methods of analysis were very different. De Tocqueville was looking in America for the material he needed for his reflections on democracy. Accordingly, he was induced to generalize unduly the special experience of local self-government in New England. Nor did he distinguish clearly between rural local government and the urban administration. This distinction was however made clear in Bryce's study. He paid more attention to the specific features of the various American institutions. His assessment refers above all to the medium and large size towns. All the same, these contrasting opinions have, at least in part, had an autonomous life of their own, almost independent of their authors' intentions. They have contributed to the shaping of an image that is present in Bryce and recurs in many studies on 19th-century America. According to this image, the lively community democracy of local government at the beginning of the century changed in a few decades into a corrupt, inefficient, thieving machine. This

process of decay of the civic sense is supposed to have had its privileged, if not sole, locus in the expanding cities.

The interpretive scheme sketched out here contrasts with the contradictory details and indications supplied by empirical investigation over the last few years. Taking off from these considerations, I have sought to show what have been the problems and the major acquisitons of historical research into 19th-century city government. In particular, I have favored institutions and political aspects, relevant to the organization and functioning of the municipal administrations. Accordingly, studies on the social composition of local ruling classes have been put in second place. I have confined myself only to mentioning research on the activities of municipal professionals. It is clear that these - institutional and social - aspects frequently overlap in the conduct of research. But specific concentration on the theme of urban elites would have required the analysis of a different range of historiographical and sociological output.(4)

The research considered refers approximately to the period from 1830 to 1890. The terminus a quo more or less marks the beginning of the most important processes of urbanization and industrialization. The terminus ad quem is vaguer. Towards the end of the century - perhaps as early as 1870 - the first impulses to reform and reorganization of municipal government came to

maturity. The problems raised by research into these years start to be different, and frequently interpenetrate questions of historiography on the "progressive era".

The span of time covered by the work goes from the early 1960s to the present. With this choice, I have sought to bring in historiographical output with certain factors of unity. These studies and researches have, howbeit in very different ways, felt the effect of the renewal of methodology and content that happened to American historiography in the 1960s. The collection has of course no pretences to completeness. The theme of municipal government is very broad and complex, and its interest lies precisely in the multiplicity of perspectives from which it may be considered. I have therefore felt it appropriate to consider researches with very different approaches, selecting the results and methodological indications that I felt most significant.

2. The Legal System

The 19th century was characterized by intense, continuous urban growth. I feel it is important to supply some brief indications about this process. It constitutes - implicitly - the reference framework for research on municipal government. Simple analysis of census data has shown that "the three decades before the (civil) war witnessed the most intense growth of cities this

country would ever experience".(5) In the second half of the century, demographic growth maintained high rates. It also affected the smaller towns in the Eastern States and the new urban settlements in the West. A few rough data may give a general idea of these changes.(6) In 1830 the inhabitants of centers with more than 2,500 residents - regarded for census purposes as "urban population" - made up 1.8% of the total population. In absolute terms, this amounted to some 1,120,000 individuals. In 1860 the proportion had risen to 20% and by 1890 to 35%, equal to 22 million individuals. Of these, 7 million lived in cities with more than 250 thousand inhabitants. The most significant increases took place in New York, Philadelphia, and, after 1860, Chicago. Mention should also be made of Boston, which in 1890 had a population of 450 thousand inhabitants, seven times what it had in 1830. Baltimore too had quadrupled; and Cincinnati and St. Louis had become transformed from small towns into metropolises with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. Alongside the big cities was a significant number of lesser urban centers. In 1860 there were already 35 towns with populations of over 25 thousand inhabitants, and more than 100 with over 10 thousand.

It should further be born in mind that the demographic growth was accompanied, and fuelled, by the physical expansion of the towns. Kenneth Jackson has shown that the growth of suburbs on the edges of urban areas had already begun in the decades following

1830. In the second half of the century the trend to expand municipal boundaries and annex suburban townships was confirmed. The most important case was that of Philadelphia. Annexation of the whole territory of the county, in 1854, quadrupled Philadelphia's population and for a few years made it the world's largest city in area. Examples of lesser but still significant annexations were those of Cleveland, Boston, St. Louis and Baltimore.(7)

During the physical and demographic expansion, the activity of the city administrations was regulated by a still imprecise and fragmentary legal framework. The definition of municipal competences began to take shape between the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In those years the cities went through what John Teaford has called a "municipal revolution".(8) Teaford has shown that until the mid-18th century local administrations had performed essentially economic and commercial functions. They controlled the prices of the main foodstuffs, regulated ports and markets and issued sales licenses. Their income came from the proceeds on commercial taxes and rentals of market stalls.(9) In the second half of the century the growth of international trade opened up new prospects for the commercial and port cities, creating different needs. The norms on the functioning of the city economy began to be perceived no longer as protecting the local economic life and guaranteeing subsistence, but as hobbling growth

and competition. Moreover, the growth in population worsened old problems and created new ones; poor hygienic conditions in some areas, growing traffic, unpaved streets. The municipal administrations were therefore impelled to abandon their economic functions. Their attention began gradually to turn towards new sectors for intervention, destined subsequently to become increasingly important. Among these were, for instance, the construction of acqueducts and sewers, fire prevention and the opening of new roads. In these cases the costs were financed by taxes on residents and owners.(10)

The change and expansion in municipal functions were accompanied by a tendency to organizational innovation. In the 18th century commercial city, the limited governing activities were entrusted to a restricted body of elective officials, the aldermen. Frequently the aldermen were elected and confirmed by acclamation. In some cases they remained in office for long periods, without any remuneration; and they could co-opt other citizens, generally selected from among local notables. With the "municipal revolution" the activity of government became more delicate and complex. The old system proved ineffective. It was gradually replaced by the periodic election of a broader number of city representatives and the creation of a first municipal bureaucracy. Legislative and executive powers, in the 18th century frequently centralized in the corps of aldermen, began to be split

up among various bodies: the mayor, the town council, the aldermen and officials elected or appointed to be in charge of specific departments.(11)

Another important feature that clearly emerged at the beginning of the century was the subordination of the municipalities to the powers of the States. This subordination was a traditional element in the history of American institutions. It derived in part from the powers exercised in the years before the Revolution by the governors and owners of the Colonies.(12) But at the beginning of the century the State pre-eminence over the cities became clarified and consolidated in decisive fashion. In those years many citizens turned to the State legislatures to secure the changes to the municipal charters that would have permitted reorganization of local government. The administrators, fearful of losing their own wide powers, were not disposed to accept these changes. There ensued an institutional conflict between States and aldermen, which concluded with the final victory of State powers.(13) The outcome of this conflict was particularly important. The charters defined powers and limits of intervention by the administrations. These were authorized thereby to acquire and possess property of their own, to impose taxes on residents and proprietors and to sue or to be sued. It might be said that the charters represented a sort of constitution for each city.(14) But by contrast with a true popular institution, they

were granted to the cities by another institution, the State legislature. As it had granted them, it could change or even withdraw them. The municipal administrations therefore ended up being from the legal point of view creatures of the States they belonged to.(14a)

The whole set of these changes - expansion in municipal functions, organizational changes, growth in State power - brought extreme fragmentation of the legal framework. In every town the definition of new functions and organizational structures was left to the charter. But the latter, as we have seen, was a document granted case by case by the individual States. Accordingly, a charter constituted a special act. There was no uniform criterion governing its mode of granting or content. Each State acted in a different way. Even within one and the same State, the legislature tended to treat each city as a specific case. The outcome was a proliferation of laws and special ad hoc provisions for the individual municipalities. It might even happen that in some towns problems might arise that had not been foreseen at the time the charter was granted: for instance, epidemics of cholera or smallpox. In such cases, the administrations had neither the powers nor the necessary financial resources to intervene promptly and effectively. The State had to modify the charter, permitting the municipality concerned to organize a new department and finance its activities through appropriate taxation. The upshot of

such procedings was that special laws were enacted for individual problems of a single town. In the second half of the 19th century attempts were made to limit the disordered expansion of this special legislation. The enactment of norms referring to specific cases was prohibited. But various States managed nevertheless to get round the bans.(15)

For several decades the long, complex labour of redefining municipal government was left to individual local experience and to decisions taken by the State courts. Historians of law and political institutions have shown that it was not until 1868 that it was possible for a jurist, Thomas Cooley, to set forth a coherent legal theory in this area. State powers vis-à-vis the cities, and the characteristics of municipal government, were for the first time clearly defined.(16) In 1872 another jurist, John Dillon, began to codify the complex legislation and case law on municipal administrations. His extensive treatise, updated and reprinted over several decades, served as "a guide to the labyrinthine law that defined the corporate functions of towns and cities".(17) Through this and other contributions, in those years legal theory began to define the double, public and private, character of the "municipal corporation". The latter's powers, as being public, had to be defined and delimited according to the will of the State authority. But as a corporation, it could, like

a private company, freely exercise the powers explicitly guaranteed by the charter.(18)

Fundamentally, it may be stated that the basic legal problem was to identify the functions, powers and rights of municipal government. In more general terms, it might be said that what was necessary was to define the city as an institution. This is a classical, recurrent question in urban history. In the American case it is rendered more complicated - and more interesting - by the legal confusion and legislative fragmentation that characterized city government in the 19th century. It seems to me significant to note how James Bryce himself, right at the start of his analysis of municipal administrations, felt the need to stress the difficulties of a study of this type: "So far as the legal arrangements go - he wrote - no general description (...)is possible in America".(19)

3. The Public Works History

In this context of legislative fragmentation and tumultuous growth, the problem arose of how to pick out the elements that were common to the various experiences of municipal government. Some significant contributions have come from urban history research, in particular that devoted to urban services and public

works. We have seen that these interventions constituted a decisive part of the new functions assumed by municipal administrations. In this case too there was an extreme diversification of times and criteria for the various local actions. But research on these topics, despite the breadth and diversity of the subject, has sought to apply common approaches and methodologies. It may perhaps be stated that public works history - as it has been called - by now constitutes a common historiographical tendency.

A decisive impulse in this direction was provided by the Public Works Historical Society, set up in 1975 at the University of Chicago. This association has already provided for the publication of many pieces of research and some bibliographical reviews.(20) Its goal is to bring research into the past into relationship with the needs and problems of today. Professional historians carry out their studies there together with civil engineers, technicians and municipal officials.(21) The relative historiographical coherence of the work is due to other reasons too. Public works history research share a common conviction: for all the failures which can be charged on the American cities, it is undeniable that a great many public works were begun in the course of the 19th century. By the end of the century, according to these studies, the standard of services could be regarded as good, certainly higher than in the big European cities. Instead of

"trumpeting" about alleged failures there ought rather to be descriptions of, to use Teaford's graphic term, a "triumph" unannounced by anybody. This triumph had gone unrecognized by turn-of-the century observers already. Accordingly, if there has been a failure, it has been one of the consolidated (but distorted) historical image of municipal government: and of the lack of attention paid by historians to the less evident aspects of administrative activity.(22)

Given these premises, one can understand how the undisputed heroes of the public works history are the professional classes: in the first place the municipal engineers. Among protagonists of the 19th century "triumph", for instance, we find Benjamin Latrobe, an engineer active early in the century. To him are due the first important waterworks in Philadelphia. But what has mainly been highlighted about Latrobe are his efforts at modernizing the activity of the American civil engineer. He helped to get new technical principles and standardized professional practices accepted; such as, for instance, the need to draw up preliminary reports and define long-term plans; the professionals' technical autonomy vis-à-vis the client; and the improvement of fees. The carrying out of long, costly public works called for an involvement that was more than merely technical. Latrobe was compelled to intervene at political level too. Using his prestige as a professional, he exercized pressure on timorous, hesitant

administrators to finance new, ambitious public works.(23) Another civil engineer, John Jervis, was commissioned by the New York municipal administration in 1836 to direct works on the aqueduct, which was finished in 1842. Jervis too knew how to act simultaneously as an excellent technician and an able administrator. He understood that in order to carry out his work he had to maintain good relationships with the public authorities, in both State and municipality. He was thus able to retain his managerial position and complete work on the aqueduct even after the State government - dominated by the Whigs - had imposed the dissolution of the Democratic municipal commission that had appointed and supported him.(24)

Other research has instead concentrated on a new professional figure, that of the sanitary engineer. The sanitary engineers were active from the second half of the century onwards. They concerned themselves in particular with technical installations constructed to solve the city's hygienic problems: drains, sewers, sewage treatment plants. Once more, the commitment of these professionals went beyond the technical supervision of the works. They showed themselves attentive to the maintenance of good sanitary conditions in the towns, even when this did not involve the carrying out of particular civil engineering works.(25) A significant example is George Waring. He was one of the most noted sanitary "engineers" of the 19th century (though actually he had

not been trained as an enginner). After 1875, in several cities, he directed the construction of sewers, promoted by the various municipal administrations. His construction techniques were the object of criticism and polemic. He nevertheless managed to achieve success; and alongside the technical activity there was intense public commitment. In his last years of life, at the apex of his career, he was given the responsibility for street-cleaning in New York. The way he carried out this responsibility well summarizes his conception of sanitary engineering as an integral part of city government. Technical interventions were combined with regulations and administrative provisions. Waring's principal objective apart from organizing the service was to make the public opinion aware. To improve the city's hygienic conditions it was necessary to get the whole population involved.(26) The same objects inspired another new professional figure, the landscape architect. This was specialized in the design of city parks and the arrangement of public open spaces. His main interests were at the same time aesthetic, sanitary and administrative. The most noted among the landscape architects was John Olmsted, who (as it is well known), among other things designed New York's Central Park and Boston's City Park.(27)

I regard it as important to bring out the analytical scheme implicit in public works history research, because its essential

lines recur in much urban historiography. In the studies considered, interventions by municipal administrations are conceived of as "responses" (or "reactions") to a "need" of the population. The reasoning underlying this conception can be summarized as follows. The cities are growing; in the meantime they have become involved in industrialization, bringing the birth of new problems. So technicians and professionals come along with their solutions. Sooner or later they are bound to triumph, since they are on the side of reason.

This schema is based on a mechanical sequence: "from need to response".(28) It reflects a mode of acting typical of many municipalities in the 19th century. The latter, badly organized and not always aware of their own new functions, often intervened only to cope with emergency situations: epidemics, fires, riots etc. Once the crisis was overcome, public intervention ended, thus proving ineffective and incoherent.(29) But the description of a widespread type of behavior cannot be used as an analytical schema. That would mean risking misunderstanding the reasons why some needs long remained unsatisfied. In many cities, for instance, the street-cleaning and garbage disposal service remained inadequate right up to the end of the century. Yet an awareness of the relationship between poor hygienic conditions and epidemics was already there. Nor could it be said that these services called for the application of sophisticated

technologies.(30) At other times, conversely, the municipal administrations favored the spread of urban services even in the absence of pressing needs.(31) Perhaps what prevailed in these cases was the desire to stimulate new demands by the population, or to favor particular interests.(32)

In these and other cases, the descriptive plan of public works history cannot be any help. Its interest lies elsewhere. Above all, research on public works supplies much useful information; thanks to which, for instance, an overall picture is now beginning to emerge of the spread of different sewer systems in various cities in the 19th century. This supplies an important factor for measuring "failures" and "triumphs" of municipal governments in a comparable way. Furthermore, some studies have shown the connections existing between the work of municipal professionals, in particular engineers, and the rationalization of administrations. We have already seen the example of research on Latrobe, Jervis and Waring. What was highlighted in these cases was the importance of the various forms of public commitment by the professionals to the realization of new urban services. An attempt at synthesis by Stanley Schultz and Clay McShane has supplied further cues on this topic.(33) These two authors have indicated what conditions were necessary in order for municipal engineers to be able to set about their interventions: long-term technical and economic planning; rapid, centralized administrative

decisions; and support from a municipal bureaucracy that had a professional, permanent character. Realizing these conditions - even partially - meant contributing towards modernizing a municipal administration. In this modernizing action, the engineers' strongpoint was their links with professional associations. These links favored the circulation of information, reference to situations beyond the local and the standardization of techniques. Sometimes the influence of the national associations acted as a mean of pressure on local hesitation. In these cases the municipal engineers found themselves in a strategic role. The cosmopolitanism and prestige of a profession undergoing expanding growth prevailed over the shackles and restrictions of the local municipalities. All this contributed, according to Schultz and McShane, towards shaping a relative uniformity in public intervention, and towards the partial overcoming of obstacles derived from the fragmentation of the legal framework.

4. Studies on the Urban Political System

The research considered hitherto gave consideration to the mechanisms and the holders of formal political power: aldermen, legislatures, municipal professionals etc. But the political scene of the American 19th-century city was yet more complex and

crowded. Beside the institutional figures were the local bosses, who held informal political powers: sometimes sanctioned by election to some office, more often legitimized only by party organizations and electoral committees. The existence of this "machine politics" characterized many city governments in the 19th century. To use an effective expression of Morton Keller's, one might say that frequently the machine constituted "Regardless of the form of government, the real locus of power".(34) And one might write of its chief exponents, the local bosses, what was said about Republican boss Thomas Platt, active in New York State at the end of the century: "Mr. Platt (...) ruled the State. (...) It was not the Governor; it was not the legislature; it was not any elected officers; it was Mr. Platt".(35)

James Bryce's verdict about the "conspicuous failure" of municipal government was founded specifically on the existence of the urban political machine and its bosses. As regards the latter, Bryce underlined their corruption, inefficiency and financial wastefulness. His analysis was based on the dichotomy between the bosses and their opponents, the reformers.(36) From Bryce onward, studies and discussions on the activity of bosses in the 19th-century cities have been numerous. Since the Second World War, the reforming critique has been accompanied by more articulated and detached reconsiderations of the machine's operations. In particular, some theoretical contributions from sociology and

political science have set out an interpretive thesis that was destined to have great success. On this thesis, the explanation for the origins and operations of the urban political machine was to be sought in the massive presence of immigrants. They, strangers to American traditions and political institutions, created and sustained party organizations capable of defending their specific interests. On this kind of analysis, the machine was regarded as the product of particularist political ethics, prevalent especially among Irish immigrants. Against this was a reform movement which was the political expression of the middle and upper classes and the bearer of universalistic values. In the conflict between bosses and reformers, the former were successful because they understood the composite character of the 19th-century American city. They realized the importance of individual problems and of the specific needs of the various ethnic groups. Thus, the activity of the machine and its bosses had an essential function for the government of the big cities.(37)

In recent years this interpretive thesis has been brought into question. In a long article published in 1976, Martin Shefter criticized the very structure of the theoretical model, as being based entirely on political competition among ethnic groups.(38) Instead, according to Shefter, to understand modes of political organization of social groups, it is not enough to take account of the characteristics of their members. The research ought also to

give consideration to the interests of the elites that are seeking to assume their political leadership. In this way Shefter inverted the prevailing thesis. The centralized political machine was regarded as the outcome of a coalition among professional politicians and economic and social elites. The objective of this alliance was control over the tumultuous, fragmented electorate.

Another criticism of the ethnic-group competition model came from Ira Katznelson in 1981.(39) Katznelson carried out an extensive survey of social movements in the 1960s in an area of Manhattan. The goal was to explain the motives and pick out the reasons for failure. The author regarded it as necessary to refer to the urban history of the 19th century. In it he sought the historical foundations of the political behavior of the immigrant working class in the cities. Katznelson did not dispute the link established between the presence of various ethnic groups and the creation of the machine. However, he considered that the specific feature of the urban political experience was something else. In the 19th-century cities the physical separation between workplace and home meant - by contrast with European countries - a parallel differentiation in political behavior. At the workplace what prevailed was militant commitment and union activity, founded on common class membership. In the residential areas, instead, the political conflict was structured around reference to one's own ethnic group. The absence of any "global politics" - whether of

class or of ethnic group - was due to the liberal characteristics of the American political system. Union activity and its main weapon, the strike, were tolerated, or repressed only mildly. They thus acted as a safety valve for class conflict. In city neighborhoods populated by immigrants, the granting of universal suffrage facilitated the creation of the party system. Thus the machine and the political parties were "invented", by the mid-century already, for the purpose of structuring mass political participation.(40)

The limits of these theoretical contributions lie in the weakness of their historical references. In Shefter's article, which referred to New York's political history in the 19th century, the original documentation is scanty or absent. Katznelson's considerations, however stimulating they may be, are founded exclusively on the superficial use of studies and analyses of very different kinds.(41) Moreover, his assertions about the freedom of the union movement are unproven, and arouse no little perplexity. By contrast, a recent piece of research by Amy Bridges, while making use of many theoretical hints offered by Shefter and Katznelson, is based on rich original documentation.(42) Bridges has looked at New York's political history between 1820 and the Civil War. The question she has asked is similar to the one in the studies just considered: how and for what reason did the machine become the characteristic form of

government of many cities in the 18th century United States? Her analysis refers to two important historical processes: industrialization and the spread of universal manhood suffrage. Bridges has highlighted the fact that these two processes - and their various implications - overlapped in the same period of years, a brief span of time. In other European countries the development of industrial capitalism had preceded the political democracy. In these cases the conflicts originating in industrialization had been primarily social and economic. Instead, in the United States, with universal suffrage widespread even in the first half of the century, the same conflicts also appeared in the electoral and political spheres. Accordingly, solving them in the cities had to depend on a reordering of urban politics. The organized parties and the machine constituted the fundamental elements of the new equilibrium that came to maturity on the threshold of the Civil War: "To the strike was added the ballot; to the riot, the nominating convention; to protest, partisan insurgency; to class, party".(43)

Bridges's research has various aspects of considerable interest. She has managed to explain the rise of the machine not by competition among ethnic groups, but through a consideration of the political forms assumed by class conflict. In this way she has come to form part of the process of revising the interpretive model of the origins of the political machine. Additionally, she

has made a critical contribution to the old controversy on the "exceptionalism" of the American historical experience. Liberal historiography of the 1950s had maintained that the chief characteristics of the American political system - in particular the non-emergence of a strong socialist movement - could be explained only by taking account of the uniqueness of United States history. This uniqueness was due above all to the absence of a feudal tradition and of a native aristocracy.(44) Bridges has shown that in order to understand some peculiar - if not truly exceptional - characteristics of the urban populations' political behavior, reference must be made to phenomena and social conflicts that developed in Europe too. Even the conceptual tools for her analysis have largely been drawn from the European tradition: notably from Marxist historians and thinkers such as Gramsci, Althusser, E.P. Thompson and especially Poulantzas.(45) This perspective has made A City in the Republic one of the very few monographs that have taken as an object a comparison with other European countries. It is precisely the comparative approach that has allowed Bridges to grasp in the implications of universal suffrage an important element in the American specificity: though in this way, curiously enough, she may have supplied a strong argument in favour of "exceptionality"...

5. Urban Biographies

Consideration of informal political power and of the role played by the mass electorate makes the theme of city government still more complex. Any research on individual aspects of municipal life - legal system, public services, activities of bosses - while useful, is inevitably partial. Fuller indications may come from historical studies devoted to one single city. These studies - the "urban biographies" - bring the organization and activity of a municipal administration into relationship with the various aspects of the story of one single city.

The urban biographies of the last two decades continue an old tradition in American historiography. But the methodological renewal of the 1960s has changed its nature.(46) Broad, decriptive narration has been replaced by the monographic analysis of case studies. In general these monographs have considered a brief period, thus extending the research deeper into specific phases of transition. Often the cities examined have constituted little more than a pretext. The goal of the new "biographers" was to study some central problems of American history and verify their own hypothesis in an urban laboratory. Thernstrom's pioneering study, which appeared in 1964, constituted a model (and an aspiration) for this type of approach. From a consideration of social mobility in the mid-century in a small town in

Massachusetts, Thernstrom managed to make an important contribution to the debate on the American "opportunities" and on working-class acceptance of the promises of upward movement.(47)

Initial general consideration of this range of research may arouse some perplexity.(48) Analytical and terminological imprecision abounds. Terms like community, industrial city, suburb, have been used by different authors in very different senses. One significant example is the use of the concept of "pre-industrial city". This has in general been located between the colonial period and around 1830. Sometimes the terminus ad quem is taken right up to the Civil War. In the research examined, the pre-industrial city has been defined as a socially cohesive organism. The relations among its members were face-to-face in type. The relationship between population and economic and social elites was characterized by deference and by acceptance of hierarchies.(49) This definition seems to have had the object of highlighting the transformations analysed in the specific case studies. But this risks making the history of 19th-century cities into simply the story of a lost unity. The schematic form of such an approach is obvious. It has been observed that the "collapse" of the pre-industrial communities and the explosion of an alleged social compactness has been located in very different periods, depending on the chronological span selected for the particular

case.(50) Furthermore, is it possible to assert that the pre-industrial city was really such a conesive organism? Considerations of a general nature, as well as hints from research, suggest a negative reply. Even if, of course, the nature of the conflicts was very different from that in the 19th century cities.(51)

Nevertheless, on some specific themes such as the one that interests us, municipal government, these monographs show the existence of common, interesting trends. The clearest indication concerns the expansion during the 19th century of municipal functions. This constitutes the - perhaps too easy - confirmation of a trend already identified by more general studies. The monographs, however, allow a more articulated hypothesis to be made. The expansion of municipal government would have had different effects depending on the cities' size. In smaller centers the process would have been accomplished by rationalization of administrative organization. In big cities, by comparison, it would have accentuated the disorder of municipal activity.

The case studied by Stuart Blumin may serve as a first interesting example. In 1820 the rural village of Kingston had some 3000 inhabitants. Forty years later, Kingston had changed into a small, robust commercial city with more than 16 thousand

inhabitants. Over this period the history of its municipal government was characterized by a linear progression towards organized, efficient activity. After 1830 - when economic growth began to take off - the administration gradually reorganized its own finances; it set up departments to which specific tasks were assigned, laying down that they be directed by elective officials; and it increased the number of regularly paid posts. In 1853 the grant of a new charter sanctioned the municipality's transformation. The board of directors was given more power. The competences of the administration were also increased, and with them expenditure and taxes. Other departments were created, notably for streets maintenance and fire prevention.(52)

In New York the expansion of municipal functions was manifested in a very different way. A significant example lies in the charter amendments granted by the State in 1849. The new tasks assigned to the administration called for the creation of ten different commissions. Each of these was chaired by a "little mayor", elected by the citizens. But this reform, applied to a metropolis like New York, brought considerable difficulties. The various sectors acted according to programs that nobody could manage to coordinate. Fiscal impositions grew uncontrollably. And the power of able but inefficient politicians tempted to spend for patronage reasons was strenghtened. In succeeding years the State government - dominated by the Republicans and hence hostile to the

Democratic municipality - had to introduce further amendments. Some commissions were put in the hands of officials directly appointed by the State. Moreover, the State sought to coordinate control over tax impositions and make them more efficient.(53)

Another trend common to the various experiences of local government takes much less obvious form. In the history of the towns considered, almost all authors felt they could identify a process of growing demarcation between public city life and the sphere of private life. In this case too it may be hypothesized- I am speaking always and only of hypotheses - that the same trend took different forms in the big towns and in smaller centers. The later were those that at mid-century had a population of less than 30 thousand inhabitants. In these the establishment of a cult of "domesticity" has been pointed to. This was particularly important, for instance, in Cambridge and Somerville, the suburban townships north of Boston studied by Binford. The inhabitants of these townships chose to favor the residential, quiet character of their own areas rather than the development of industrial or commercial activity. In this way they defined the nature and goals of the municipal administrations. These were to provide services and institutions that would maintain the residential characteristics of these small towns and ward off the dangers of the metropolis. Accordingly, the centrality of the home and of domestic life was not in opposition to the citizens' municipal

commitment. On the contrar , these choices nastened the disappearance of the old peripheral communities, which were disorganized and informal, and impelled the formation of "suburban municipalities" which were autonomous and efficient.(54)

A similar positive connection between the private sphere and participation in public life has been identified by Michael Frisch. Frisch's research on Springfield constituted an important point of reference, perhaps still unsurpassed, for subsequent studies on urban communities. The changes in Springfield between 1840 and 1880 were determined by a combination of local and national stimuli: demographic and economic growth, the implications of the Civil War, the choices of the urban political elite and the influence and stimulus of other towns. The analysis of these historical events turned around two mean concepts: community and public interest. According to Frisch, the passage from "community" to "city" became possible when awareness of the existence of a public interest matured. For the first time, this was distinguished from the various private interests. For example, around 1870 the municipal administration considered how to ensure more efficient distribution of drinking and other domestic water. Until then, the public supply of water had been limited to protection of property in the event of fire. Provision of water for other uses had been left to the private individual. Frisch has stressed that the decision to build a water-supply system was not

solely bound up with demographic growth, nor determined by some particular crisis. The most important change concerned the conception of municipal government. Public intervention henceforth represented in the citizens' eyes "an abstract projection of collective needs and goals not at all reducible to the sum of constituent private interests".(55) This distinction between private and public spheres allowed the gradual organization of a modern municipal administration. The process was neither rapid nor linear. In 1877 a city referendum threw out a proposal to revise the charter, which would have given the local government greater, better defined powers. Perhaps the electorate was already beginning to feel the need to limit public powers and was trying to defend itself from them.(56)

Warner's studies on Boston and Philadelphia which appeared in the 1960s showed that in these big cities the notion of public interest was perceived in a very different way. In these cases urban growth seemed to have brought with it a weakening of the people's interest in municipal problems. To understand the roots of this phenomenon, Warner proposed to use the notion of "privatism". This was defined as the "concentration upon the individual and the individual's search for wealth".(57) According to Warner, this individualistic tradition characterized American urban history, especially from the years following 1830. It prevented the larger cities from functioning as organized

collectivities. Their physical form, their economic growth and the characteristics of the political system were all determined solely by thousands of individual, unplanned initiatives.

Applying this general thesis to the case of Philadelphia, Warner did a broad, well-documented study. Sometimes the thesis of privatism has been applied rather schematically. It has seemed inadequate for understanding the articulated, contradictory indications from empirical research.(58) But for the study of municipal government the notion of privatism presents some rather interesting aspects. In Warner's conception the link between urban growth and the strengthening of individualism did not constitute an always valid principle generally applicable to the process of urbanization. Privatism in the cities was regarded as the local manifestation of a national cultural tradition. Moreover - and this is the most innovative aspect - privatism was fuelled by the specific forms taken on by American urbanization. The now classical research on the urban growth of Boston supplied the most interesting indications in this connection. Warner showed that the individualism of the citizens at the turn of the century was strengthened by the extension and fragmentation of the suburban areas. These became the preferred place of residence for middle-class families, keen to pursue the myth of rural life. In this way a vicious circle arose. The urban growth stimulated further expansion of municipal activity. But the growth of the suburbs and

the social fragmentation of the metropolis weakened participation in public life.(59) The outcome of these processes contributed to the formation of a weak municipal government, incapable of planning its own interventions and an easy tool of private interests.

6. Conclusion

In the eyes of the European historian, research on American municipal government in the 19th century presents various very special features. It sketches out a landscape inhabited by a confused and fragmented legal system; the activity of new, still poorly defined professional figures; the weight of universal manhood suffrage and of the political parties; and the autonomous growth of strong suburban municipalities. Some of these processes seem to be peculiar to the American case. Others are also present in European countries, and might lend themselves to comparison. To be sure, the comparison between the United States and Europe offers the risk of being too generic. But the impression is that American historiography on these topics tends in any case to accentuate national peculiarities rather than to lay the foundations for possible comparisons. Perhaps language barriers contribute to strengthening this "isolationist" tendency. It may be significant to note that even Amy Bridges's research, among the

few to seek to break out of a purely American perspective, exclusively uses contributions from English-language authors, or those translated into English. This gives a risk of neglecting the value of theoretical and historiographical indications not yet widespread in the United States; and of basing one's theses on individualism, exceptionalism, privatism or whatever, without referring except in generic fashion to the historical experience of other countries, from which a remote stance is taken. All this confers an ambivalent character on this historiographical output. It consists of a set of research and of rich methodological suggestions, which are informed and stimulating and need to be referred to in dealing with the same themes in a European context. At the same time, however, it appears as an island, resistant to outside contact, which offers very few elements of guidance to the visitor from outside and proclaims itself self-sufficient.

After all there is perhaps also an awareness of being in a phase of redefinition of the field of study. Among so much dissent, American historians concur on one statement: there is not yet any convincing overall view of the history of municipal government in the 19th century. Research on specific aspects or case studies have not clearly identified the existence of lines of development common to the diverse local situations. Moreover, contrasting methodologies and interpretive hypotheses block possibilities of reaching a synthesis.

In part these difficulties once again reflect some peculiarities of the American historical experience. The vastness of the territory and legislative fragmentation make it difficult to pick out unifying factors. The very term "American city" risks being too broad a generalization. In the second half of the century urbanization of the West took on rhythms and characteristics of its own. After the Civil War the South's urban structure too went through profound changes. It is hard to bring the forms of government of such diverse urban situations into a single view.

Nevertheless, the absence of a unitary synthesis also expresses a more general idea. Rather than aspire to syntheses, some historians of the 19th century have sought to bring out the existence of contradictory characteristics in American history, especially in the second half of the century. One of the best known and most coherent expositions of this idea was developed by Herbert Gutman. Gutman identified the unifying element in the period 1843-93 specifically in the tension between contrasting values and behavior. In those years the ideal of equality of the "native born" and the pre-industrial culture rooted in the European immigrants clashed with the new forms of wage-dependence and of organization of industrial work.(60) On very different ground, a similar indication has been supplied by the broad study put out by Morton Keller. He looked at the activity of public

institutions in the period between the Civil War and the end of the century. He showed that the persistence of attitudes and behavior rooted in pre-industrial society was manifest in the activity of institutions too. This was true particularly at federal level, but also in State and local administrations. For instance, before 1880 new demands grew for a more incisive, "modern" social policy, especially in the fields of health, education and welfare. But these demands ran up against the fear of any form of change, the defense of local privileges and in general the wide-spread hostility towards public intervention.(61) It seems to me that historical research on municipal government has shown that these conflicts were present in the cities too. A recent article by Hendrik Hartog refers to them. The author, a legal historian, criticized Teaford's book's approach to the "triumph" of the 19th-century municipalities. Teaford, noted Hartog, has confined himself to inverting the prevalent opinion of the last few decades. But it is useless today to seek to give an answer to the verdicts given by Bryce a century ago. The historian's task is rather to treat the activity of municipal institutions as the result of compromises and negotiations among contrasting social forces. At the present stage of research, any attempt at synthesis risks being premature or schematic.(62)

The difficulty of arriving at an all-round view and the refusal to do so show a direction for historical research to work

in. The 19th century has for long been studied in a unilateral, teleological way. Many American historians today might share the views of the Englishman William Brock. Brock's hope is that the time might soon come for a less linear history of the American 19th century; a history that "demolish the theory that there once existed Nineteenth-century 'certainties', which went through a crisis in the 1890s and were broken down by critical attack during the progressive years".(63)

NOTES

*I wish to thank Professor Stephan Thernstrom for the assistance given during my research in Cambridge, at the Harvard University.

1. A. de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York: A. Knopf, 1945), vol. I, chap. V, p. 94.

2. J.C. Teaford, The Unheralded Triumph. City Government in America, 1870-1900 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 1.

3. J. Bryce, The American Commonwealth (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1888; facsimile reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973), vol. II, chap. LI, p. 281. On the comparison Tocqueville versus Bryce see also C.N. Glaab, A.T. Brown, A History of Urban America (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1983; first edition, 1967), p. 177.

4. On this theme see the conspectus by D.C. Hammack, "Problems in the Historical Study of Power in the Cities and Towns of the United States, 1800-1960", American Historical Review, 2 (1978), pp. 323-349; and the summarizing articles by E.

Pessen, "Who Governed the Nation's Cities in the 'Era of the Common Man'?", Political Science Quarterly, 4 (1972), pp. 591-614, and "The Social Configuration of the Antebellum City. An Historical and Theoretical Inquiry", Journal of Urban History, 3 (1976), pp. 267-306. Research and the historiographical debate have been much influenced by R.A. Dahl's classic study Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1961).

5. H.P. Chudacoff, The Evolution of American Urban Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1981; first edition 1975), p. 62.

6. The data that follow have been taken from some of the many handbooks (or works of synthesis) that have appeared in recent years on American urban history; in particular from H.P. Chudacoff, cit. (perhaps one of the best), S.B. Warner, jr., The Urban Wilderness. A History of the American City (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); R.A. Monl, J.F. Richardson (eds.), The Urban Experience. Themes in American History (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1973). These volumes in general give the indications of the census, with elaborations of their own (but see also the data supplied by E.S. Griffith, C.R. Adrian, A History of American City Government. The Formation of Traditions, 1775-1870

(Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983; 1st edition, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), pp. 20-21, 27; and E.P. Pessen, "The Social Configuration", cit.).

7. Cf. K.T. Jackson, "Metropolitan Government Versus Suburban Autonomy: Politics on the Crabgrass Frontier", in K.T. Jackson, S.K. Schultz (eds.), Cities in American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 442-462. By the same author see also "The Crabgrass Frontier: 150 Years of Suburban Growth in America", in R.A. Mohl, J.F. Richardson (eds.), cit., pp. 196-221, for a synthesis that also includes the 20th century; and "Urban Deconcentration in the Nineteenth Century: A Statistical Inquiry", in L.F. Schnore (ed.), The New Urban History. Quantitative Explorations by American Historians (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 110-142, for a very sophisticated quantitative analysis. These and other contributions have now been distilled into K.T. Jackson's Crabgrass Frontier. The Suburbanization of the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For some indications that in part contrast with those of Jackson, see J.C. Teaford, City and Suburb. The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 1-64.

8. J.C. Teaford, The Municipal Revolution in America. Origins of Modern Urban Government, 1650-1825 (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

9. Ibid, pp. 16-34; see also, G.B. Nash, The Urban Crucible. Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 26-37.

10. J.C. Teaford, The Municipal Revolution, pp. 47-63 and 91-110. For a critique of Teaford's thesis and a proposed later dating of the municipal evolution (or at least for an indication of the persistence of the old model well into the 19th century) see M.H. Ebner's review, "Urban Government in America, 1776-1876", Journal of Urban History, 4(1979), pp. 511-520; and especially the research by A.I. Marcus, "The Strange Career of Municipal Health Initiatives. Cincinnati and City Government in the Early Nineteenth Century", Journal of Urban History, 1 (1980), pp. 3-29; some interesting hints can also be found in A. Bridges, "Becoming American. The Working Classes in the United States Before the Civil War", in I. Katznelson, A. Zolberg (eds.), Working Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 19-20 (ms, to be published soon; I thank Amy Bridges for

having allowed consultation). It should however be noted that Teaford set out a basic thesis and was impelled to simplify from a need to synthesize; especially since this trend never took the form of a general law - for instance, no federal municipal law existed in the United States - but, as we shall see better below, constituted the sum of diverse local experiences.

11. See J.C. Teaford, The Municipal Revolution, pp. 67-78 and above all E.S. Griffith, C.R. Adrian, cit., pp. 156-197. It may again be noted that in general the town council was elected on a ward system. However, the various cities adopted very differentiated forms of administrative organization, reflected also in the differing terminologies used to denote the various municipal bodies. On the important peculiarities of New England, especially Boston - which til 1822 was not an autonomous municipality and had a history of its own - cf. R.A. McCaughey, Josiah Quincy. 1772-1864. The Last Federalist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 96-106.

12. See E.S. Griffith, C.R. Adrian, cit., p. 23 and 27. This is a volume in the series A History of American City Government, started by Ernest Griffith in the 1930s and continued to this date. It consists of descriptive studies, outdated in

plan but very useful as far as the information goes. As well as the one cited (the only one written in collaboration with another author), see The Colonial Period (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938; now: New York: Da Capo Press, 1972); The Conspicuous Failure, 1870-1900 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974); The Progressive Years and their Aftermath, 1900-1920 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974).

13. Cf. J.C. Teaford, The Municipal Revolution, pp. 79-90.

14. Cf. E.S. Griffith, C.R. Adrian, cit., pp. 30-39.

14a. "Municipal corporations owe their origin to, and derive their powers and rights wholly from, the legislature. It breathes into them the breath of life, without which they cannot exist. As it creates, so it may destroy. If it may destroy, it may abridge and control. (...) (The municipal corporations) are, so to phrase it, the mere tenants at will of the legislature"; J. Dillon, 1868, quoted in E.A. Gere, Jr., "Dillon's Rule and the Cooley Doctrine. Reflections of the Political Culture", Journal of Urban History, 3 (1982), p. 273. The quotation is taken from a judgement of the Iowa Supreme Court, of which Dillon was then Chief Justice. On Dillon's importance, see below.

15. On the expansion of special legislation and the consequent attempts to limit it towards the end of the century cf. E.S. Griffith, C.R. Adrian, cit., pp. 53-62, and K. Fox, Better City Government. Innovation in American Urban Politics, 1850-1937 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), pp. 9-12 and 56-62. The prohibitions were got round by the enactment of - formally general - laws aimed at communities with very specific characteristics (for instance : an act for cities in a given State with populations of more than 300 thousand inhabitants). This made it possible in fact to refer to one single city; cf. E.A. Gere, Jr., cit., pp. 291-294.

16. Cf. K. Fox, cit., pp. 23-29; for a comprehensive analysis of the figure of Cooley see A. Jones, "Thomas M. Cooley and 'Laissez-Faire Constitutionalism': A Reconsideration", The Journal of American History, 4 (1967), pp. 751-771.

17. M. Keller, Affairs of State. Public Life in Late Nineteenth America, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 115; see also K. Fox, cit., pp. 29-33. For an interpretation different from Fox's, which against it counterposes Dillon to Cooley, see E.A. Gere, cit. (which however seems poorly documented and not always convincing).

18. Cf. M. Keller, cit., pp. 335-336; and above all K. Fox, cit., pp. 29-33 and 70-74. A similar distinction - between cities sometimes as small States and sometimes as big corporations - was contained in the chapter written by Brooklyn ex-mayor and reformer Seth Low for Bryce's work (see "An American View of Municipal Government in the United States", in J. Bryce, cit., vol. II chap. LII, especially pp. 302-303). Another interesting distinction from the same has been analysed by D.C. Hammack, Power and Society, Greater New York at the Turn of the Century, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1982), pp. 7-10: "a city is at one the same time a decentralized portion of the general government of the State and a cooperative organization of property owners for the administration of private property"; (S. Sterne, "Administratrion of American Cities", in J.J. Lalor (ed.) Cyclopedia of Political Science (New York, 1895), vol. I, p. 464, quoted in D. Hammack, cit., p. 7. The failure to distinguish between the two aspects lay, according to Sterne, at the basis of the American municipal problem.

19. J. Bryce, cit., vol. II, chap. L, p. 263. It should nevertheless be recalled that the second volume of Bryce's work still remains today an excellent, clear description of the of local government in the United States in the second half of the 19th century (cf. esp. pp. 220-320).

20. For an overall consideration of the twelve brief studies that appeared between 1976 and 1982 see C. McShane, "Essays in Public Works History", Journal of Urban History, 2 (1984), 223-228; the last of these studies offers a useful, documented survey: E.P. Moehring, Public Works and Urban History: Recent Trends and New Directions (Chicago: Public Works Historical Society, 1982). Additionally, the American Works Association (hereafter APWA) of which the Historical Society mentioned is an offshoot, has published a broad summary of the history of public works and a very extensive classified bibliography; see APWA (E.L. Armstrong, ed.), History of Public Works in the United States, 1776-1976 (Chicago: APWA, 1976), and APWA (S.M. Hoy, M.C. Robin- eds.), Public Works History in the United States. A Guide to the Literature (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982). All these works are referred to for fuller bibliographical indications.

21. In this connection see the considerations by Joel Tarr, one of leading lights of public works history: J.A. Tarr, "Introduction" (to the monograph issue edited by Tarr himself on the theme: "The City and Technology"), Journal of Urban History, 3 (1979), pp. 275-278; and B.M. Stave, "A Conversation with Joel A. Tarr. Urban History and Policy", Journal of Urban History, 2 (1983), pp. 195-232. Some

information on the urban history output regarded as public history can be found in D.F. White," 'The Underdeveloped Discipline': Directions/Misdirections in American Urban History", American Studies International, 2 (1984), especially pp. 124-126.

22. J.C. Teaford, The Unheralded Triumph, and "Technology Expertise, and Municipal Services, 1860-1940", Journal of Urban History, 3 (1984), pp. 319-328 (the latter is a survey of some research on urban public services).

23. E.C. Carter, II, Benjamin Henry Latrobe and Public Works: Professionalism, Private Interest, and Public Policy in the Jefferson (Washington, D.C. : Public Works Historical Society, 1976).

24. L.D. Lankton, The "Practicable" Engineer : John B. Jervis and the Old Croton Aqueduct (Chicago: Public Work Historical Society, 1977).

25. On sanitary engineering in the United States see J.A. Tarr, souterraines. Les égouts et l'environnement humain dans les villes américaines. 1850-1933", Les Annales de la recherche urbaine, 23-24 (1984), pp. 65-89; some interesting considerations can also be found in J.A. Peterson, "The

Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890", Journal of Social History, 1 (1979), pp. 83-103.

26. Cf. M.V. Melosi, Pragmatic Environmentalist: Sanitary Engineer George E. Waring, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Public Works Historical Society, 1977); on the technical controversies opposing Waring to many other technical engineers see J.A. Tarr, "The Separate Vs. Combined Sewer Problems. A Case Study in Urban Technology Design Choice", Journal of Urban History, 3 (1979), pp. 308-339.

27. On the public parks and on Olmsted see APWA, History, pp. 553-584 and J.A. Peterson, cit., pp. 91-94. However, the bibliography on Olmsted, a public figure involved in many fields, is vast. The best biography is regarded as being L.W. Roper's FLO. A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

28. A similar scheme was according to Samuel Hays applied by urban historians to the political history of American cities: see S.P. Hays, "The Changing Political Structure of the City in Industrial America", Journal of Urban History, 1 (1974), 6. Another interesting criticism of this schema, defined as "an evolutionary explanation for the appearance of the

various services encompassed by the functionalist model of government" is in K. Fox, cit., pp. 207-208.

29. On the casualness and ineffectiveness of many municipal interventions see A.I. Marcus, "The Strange Career", (who however takes this analysis as a basis for maintaining the - rather disputable - thesis that the 19th century municipalities were still prevalently commercial and economic; cf. Note 10). For much information on this mode of action of municipal administrations during the cholera epidemics see C.E. Rosenberg, The Cholera Years. The United in 1832, 1849 and 1866 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

30. Cf. APWA, History, pp. 431-456.

31. Mention might be made of the examples of the growth of urban parks (cf. Note 27) and the distribution of drinking water: see APWA, History, pp. 217-246 and N.M. Blake, Water for the Cities: A History of the Urban Water Supply Problem in the States (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1958). In this last case, though, it might be better to speak of particularly prompt "responses" to "needs" that were, after all, real (if not exactly pressing).

32. See for example H.C. Binford, The First Suburbs. Residential Communities on the Boston Periphery. 1815-1860. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 113-118, which considers the case of the small town of Cambridge, which between 1830 and 1850 laid out a town park, built a lodging-house for the poor, organized fire-prevention, decided to build sewers, etc. 7.

33. S.K. Shultz, C. McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth Century America", The Journal of American History, 2 (1978), pp. 389-411.

34. M. Keller, cit., p. 335 (my italics).

35. H.F. Gosnell, Boss Platt and His new York Machine...(New York, 1969; first edition: 1914), quoted in D.C. Hammack, Power and Society, p. 9 (the phrase about Platt is supposed to have come from another republican, Elinu Root).

36. See J. Bryce, cit., pp. 321-536; for an analysis of the conception of power in Bryce and of the influence his local informers had see D.C. Hammack "Elite Perceptions of Power in the Cities of the United States. 1880-1900. The Evidence of

James Bryce, Moisei Ostrogorski and their American Informants", Journal of Urban History, 4 (1978), pp. 363-396.

7. See in particular R.K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure. Toward the Codification of Theory and Research (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), pp. 70-81; E.C. Banfield, J.Q. Wilson, City Politics (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967; first edition: 1963), pp. 115-127 and passim; N. Glazer, D.P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot. The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press and Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 219-229. For an interesting reconsideration of Merton's contribution, lying within the historiographical debate of the 1950s and 1960s, see T.J. McDonald, "The Problem of the Political in Recent American Urban History: Liberal Pluralism and the Rise of Functionalism", Social History, 3(1985), especially pp. 328-336. For a summary of the literature on the machine and the bosses see B.M. Stave (ed.), Urban Bosses, Machines, and Progressive Reformers (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1972), and "Urban Bosses and Reform", in R.A. Mohl, J.F. Richardson (eds.), cit., pp. 182-195. Some bibliographical revision in H. Chudacoff, cit., pp. 164-165.

38. M. Shefter, "The Emergence of the Political Machine: An Alternative View", in W.D. Hawley, M. Lipsky (eds.) Theoretical perspectives on Urban Politics (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1976), pp. 14-44.

39. I. Katznelson, City Trenches. Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982; first ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

40. Ibid., pp. 45-75.

41. See esp. the chapter 2 : "Community, Capitalist Development, and the Emergence of Class" (Ibid., pp. 25-44) in which Katznelson takes a fast trip through the centuries - with the aid of texts of Pirenne, Mumford, Braudel etc. - with the aim of tracing the origins of the phenomena studied into the Middle Ages.

42. A. Bridges, A City in the Republic. Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

43. Ibid., p. 8. Amy Bridges has returned to her arguments and amplified them in "Becoming American". More reductive but

still interesting is Alan Dawley's thesis that the franchise and electoral success acted as safety valve for the discontent and protests of the working class; see A. Dawley, Class and Community. The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 66-72 and 214-219.

But the theme of electoral suffrage has been rather neglected by historians of the urban political system. In the first half of the century the already limited property restrictions were abolished in almost all States. There remained the exclusion of blacks, which was to last even beyond the Civil War; and the limitation of voting rights to males, not abolished until the 1918 constitutional amendment. For a history of suffrage in the 19th century see C. Williamson, American Suffrage. From Property to Democracy. 1760-1860 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); on restrictions in voting rights connected with length of residence and their important (and perhaps underestimated) implications cf. the hints in S. Thernstrom, "Socialism and Social Mobility", in J.H.M. Laslett, S.M. Lipset (eds.), Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984; first ed., 1974), p. 425; for a hypothesis that attributes low importance to the political and social

implications of universal manhood suffrage see E. Pessen, "Who Governed".

44. A locus classicus of the historiography of "exceptionalism" is L. Hartz's The Liberal Tradition in America. An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955); see also some articles and the discussion of specific topics in J.H.M. Laslett,S.M. Lipset (eds.), cit. A recent renewed presentation - somewhat provocative but interesting - of the themes of exceptionalism can be found in J.P. Diggins, "Comrades and Citizens: New Mythologies in American Historiography", American Historical Review, 3 (1985), pp. 614-638.

45. Gramsci and E.P. Thompson are important historical references for many "anti-exceptionalist" historians. For a summary and a lucid critique of this historiography see S. Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790-1920", International Labor and Working Class History, 26 (1984), esp. pp. 1-6.

46. On traditional urban biographies see M.H. Frisch, "L'histoire urbaine américaine: réflexions sur les tendances récentes", Annales E.S.C., 4 (1970), pp. 880-887; on the methodological renewal see M.H. Frisch, "American Urban History as an

Example of Recent Historiography", History and Theory, 3(1979), pp. 350-377 and C. Tilly, "Vecchio e nuovo nella storia sociale", Passato e presente, 1982, pp. 37-44.

47. S. Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress. Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964). A debate on Thernstrom's now classic research was held at the October 1984 meeting of the "Social Science History Association", and will be published in Social Science History, Spring 1986. ("Thernstrom's Poverty and Progress: A retrospective Look After 20 Years", with contributions by M. Frisch, S.A. Riess, E. Pessen and S. Thernstrom).

48. These pages take into consideration in particular the following monographs: S.B. Warner, Jr., Streetcar Suburbs. The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); S. Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress; S.B. Warner, Jr., The Private City. Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); (as major examples of the renewal of the 1960s). M.H. Frisch, Town into City. Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972);

D.H.Doyle, The Social Order of a Frontier Community. Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-1870 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978); S.M. Blumin, The Urban Threshold. Growth and Change in a Nineteenth Century American Community (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976); H.C. Binford, The First Suburbs (as examples of studies on urban communities); and also, separately, the works by A. Dawley, cit., and A. Bridges, A City in the Republic.

49. See, for example, S. Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress, pp. 33-56; S.B. Warner, Jr., The Private City, pp. 3-45; M.H. Frisch, Town into City pp. 10-49. More articulated definitions were used by S.M. Blumin, cit., and especially by H.C. Binford, cit., passim.

50. In this connection see the observations of T. Bender, Community and Social Change in America (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982; 1st ed., 1978), pp. 45-58.

51. See for example, P. Burke, "Some Reflections on the Pre-Industrial City", Urban History Yearbook (1975), pp. 13-21; and D. Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-Industrial American City, 1780-1830", Labor History, 1 (1968), pp. 3-22.

52. S.M. Blumin, cit., pp. 20-21, 118-120, 126-149 (and passim). For similar examples see D.H. Doyle, cit., pp. 194-226; and, with some different nuances, A. Dawley, cit., pp. 104-113.

53. A Bridges, A City in the Republic, pp. 135-137. For another example of a big city, Philadelphia, see S.B. Warner, Jr., The Private City, pp. 99-124.

54. H.C. Binford, cit., pp. 103-124, 188-217 and passim.

55. M.H. Frisch, Town Into City, p. 174; on the story of the acqueduct see esp. pp. 167-172; for an example of conflict between public interest (norms on hygiene) and private interests (of tax payers and owners) see pp. 229-237. However, these are only a few examples; Frisch's whole monograph supplies many indications on these themes.

56. Ibid, pp. 213-218. On the general tendency in the years following 1870 to restrict the powers and the margins of action of public corporations, cf. M. Keller, cit., pp. 10-114.

It should be recalled that Frisch used the theoretical concept of city defined by a German sociologist who in turn referred to indications from Max Weber : A city is a

settlement in which the total life and therefore the daily life as well show a tendency toward polarization, that is, either into a small aggregate of public activity or into one of private activity. (...) The more clearly the polarity and the reciprocal relationship between public and private spheres are defined, the more 'city-like', sociologically speaking, is the life of a settlement"; H.P. Bahrdt, "Public Activity and Private Activity as Basic Forms of City Association" in R.L. Warren (ed.) Perspectives on the American Community (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966, p. 80; first published, 1961), partly quoted in M.H. Frisch, Town into City, p. 48.

57. S.B. Warner, Jr., The Private City, p. 4.

58. See e.g. the part on the waterworks: a story of relative success of public intervention, hard to fit into the thesis of privatism (Ibid, pp. 102-11). Warner's thesis was severely criticized by M.H. Frisch, "L'nistoire urbaine américaine", pp. 887-889. However, it should also be pointed out that the thesis of privatism has - perhaps precisely because of its simplicity - had great influence on American urban historiography; and that Warner, with his research on Boston and Philadelphia, has shown an ability to gather important aspects of the history of American cities and

define them effectively, even if perhaps rather simplistically. On the differing importance for American urban historiography of the work of Thernstrom and Warner, see R.A. Mohl, "The new urban history and its alternatives: some reflections on recent U.S. scholarship on the twentieth-century city", Urban History Yearbook (1983), pp. 19-28.

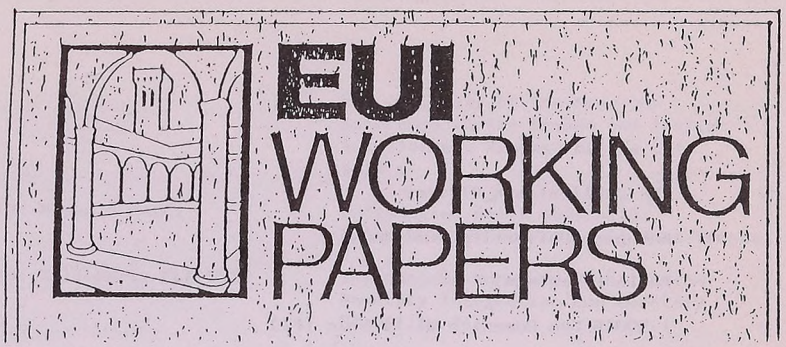
59. S.B. Warner, Jr., Streetcar Suburbs, pp. 159-166.

60. H.G. Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1819", American Historical Review, 1973, now in Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America. Essays in American Working-Class and Social History (New York: A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 50 ff.

61. M. Keller, cit., pp. 122-161.

62. H. Hartog, "The Conclusions of Urban History and those of Lord Bryce", Reviews in American History, 3 (1985), pp. 374-379.

63. W.R. Brock, Investigation and responsibility. Public Responsibility in the United States, 1885-1900 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 260.



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